
CHAPTER 5

Creative Campers

AS TIME PASSED we found the campers playing a large part in the development of Tanamakoon. When they saw a need, they took the initiative in doing something about it. First of all there was need for campsites along the thickly wooded shore, where we could go for cookouts and for overnight camping trips. A new campsite often required a new trail so that it could be reached by land as well as by water. Each site and trail was opened with due ceremony — the traditional cutting of the ribbon barring the entrance, and speeches. The first of these campsites was Can-ta-ka-ye meaning Happy Meeting Ground. This point later became the home of the Cree Council ring.

Next they built the Jean Norton campsite as a memorial to a little Sioux camper from Rochester who, in her brief life, had come to know and love the woods, and was in turn loved by all of us. The Sioux trail was made leading to this campsite.

We had a mania for naming familiar places and things around camp. As we were living in an Indian country, Indian names generally prevailed, such as Mitawanga, meaning "There is sand on the shore." This name was

given to the clearing on the west bay where the Cree cabins now stand; other names were Tawana, "The white swan," which was the launch, and Wabanoose, a proper name, given to the Director's cabin.

Such places as Counsellor's Point and Wolf's Cove, hark back in name to early associations, and still others take on the names of their discoverers; through the years these names have clung. Punch and Mookey, the twin lakes on a hill across from the camp, are among the most familiar. In the vicinity of Punch and Mookey was the deserted beaver village to which we made a visit from time to time. These jaunts had something of the nature of an archaeological expedition.

For years the beaver had worked at building this dam higher and higher and the water had flooded farther and farther back, bringing them always closer to the timber that provided their food and building material. Eventually the dam broke and the water ebbed away so that what looked like a deserted village came to light. It was fascinating to see what a tidy folk the beaver were. On the surface beaver dams had seemed to be a mere pile of sticks and stones; but here we would see that below the surface were smooth-cut walls of mud pounded into shape by countless blows of the tail. There were several beaver houses on this one pond; apparently as the family increased they had expanded their living quarters. The careful planning of the whole area reminded one somewhat of old Pompeii.

The campers had had a yen to build things too, and the hatchet, saw and hammer became creative in their hands. The first request along this line was for permission to make cedar furniture for the campgrounds, so we brought in a woodcraft instructor. A host of cedar benches and tables resulted, which quickly filled a need along the shore or in front of the cabins. Nor was that all. Heretofore the

151

chapel service had been held in the Lodge. The campers felt the service might take on a greater sanctity if it were held in the open under the trees. The perfect spot was found overlooking the lake. Everyone joined in clearing the underbrush and enclosing the site with a cedar railing; the branches of the surrounding birch and pine made a natural roof. The chapel became a much loved part of camp.

Following the chapel, the campers built an Adirondack shelter at Can-Ta-Ka-Ye. This was the first of many shelters built by them in this part of the Park. It was later put on a float and moved to Dawandena.

The greatest venture in this field was the theatre. It had been our hope to have a theatre sometime, but nothing was done about it until the campers again took the initiative. Dora Mavor Moore was the counsellor for dramatics at that time, and no doubt spurred their enthusiasm. Almost at once a spot was found. A corner post was set in with the usual records safely buried underneath.

But we acted too hastily this time. The site, we discovered, was too low-lying. The joists, which were partly laid, were moved the following day, and moved again a second time, before the theatre found its rightful place on a natural plateau with land rising away from it. Typical of George was his remark when we told him a second move was necessary. "If that's where you want it, that's where it's going to be; only next time let's put it on wheels."

Mrs. Moore designed the theatre; George acted as foreman and was assisted by campers and counsellors. So enthusiastic was he that he searched the woods far and wide until he found a tree with a perfect arch for a proscenium. Cedar logs were used throughout in an upright position for walls. The campers did the shingling, and for a time the forest rang with the sound of hammers wielded to the rhythm of camp songs. Finally the last

shingle was laid, and the opening play was ready to be performed.

The following is taken from a Toronto paper's description of the opening:

THEATRE IN THE WILD WOODS

They talk—and they write—a great deal about “the little theatre.” But I want to tell you something about a homemade theatre, a less romantic name, perhaps, but a no less romantic achievement.

This homemade theatre was set up this summer at Camp Tanamakoon, in Algonquin. There are all sorts of snapshots showing campers astride the peak of a roof, industriously shingling, or working away with might and main at other occupations that her grandmother might have stigmatized as not quite ladylike, forgetting that her own pioneer mothers and grandmothers did all these things and more.

But to the theatre—it was made of logs, of course, and bark was introduced into the architecture at strategic points. Mrs. George Nasmith, one of the earliest movers in the homemade drama in Toronto, was present and laid the corner log of the building. Dora Mavor Moore, one of the counsellors, was the producer of the opening play.

It was all a matter of first things. Never before had the camp put on a real theatrical performance, never before had they had real programmes designed in the camp. No real names were placed on the programmes—just those of the performers in character, for the reason that in many cases the girl who was off the stage and behind the scenes had had really more to do with the success of the show than the girls who were in the cast of “The Poetaster of Isfahan.” This play lent itself rather readily to camp properties. For one thing, the gay pyjamas which the campers had brought made excellent costuming for street scenes in Persia.

As for scenery in the accepted sense, there was none. Candles in tomato cans made gay footlights; camp lanterns, hung from a beam, shed their rays upon the players; and for the rest of the properties brown paper and some paint achieved wonderful effects. Music by a three-piece orchestra came from somewhere outside the theatre among the pines

and spruces, and the whole thing went with a swing and the true dramatic verve.

The audience brought their blankets and sat under the trees watching.

The marionette theatre came next — a miniature of the large one. Few who were present at the first production in it would forget Paderewski at the piano, his waltz being played behind the scenes, and his arms and head keeping such perfect rhythm that we could almost believe the music to be coming from his cardboard piano.

The next big venture in building was the Council ring at Dawandena. This was made large enough to accommodate the whole camp. It was really built by the men, but the campers planned it and carved and painted designs and Indian symbols as part of its equipment.

The large Council ring and the theatre are perhaps the two woodcraft projects which stand out as being unique in our experience at Tanamakoon. The fact that all these projects were originated and carried out by the campers themselves had undoubtedly played a large part in the profound affection with which the old campers regard the camp. They felt they had a real stake in its building; they had invested in it something of themselves. It was their camp in a special way.

II

A Camp Matures

CHAPTER 6

The New Era

IN 1931, a number of the directors of the privately organized camps in Ontario who lived in Toronto, began to realize that in order to accomplish their common aims it was necessary to work together. Up to this time, we, the private camp directors, had been pretty much a law unto ourselves, setting our own standards and solving our problems as we saw fit.

Mr. Cochrane and Mr. Chapman took the initial steps in getting us together. Mr. Cochrane was the director of Temagami, the first Canadian privately organized camp on record. The original site was on Lake Muskoka, and was established in 1900. Three years later, Mr. Cochrane moved his camp to the present site on Lake Temagami in Northern Ontario. It was Mr. Cochrane who introduced the Royal Life Saving programme into this country, and he has contributed much towards the development of swimming instruction and water safety. Mr. Chapman was the Director of Kagawong, a boys' camp on Balsam Lake, established in 1908. Mr. Chapman was in charge of the Physical Education programme for the boys at St. Andrews' College, Toronto (later Aurora) for nearly thirty years.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Taylor Statten, Directors of Ahmek and Wapomeo, boys' and girls' camps in Algonquin Park established in 1921 and 1924 respectively. Mr. Statten, a world figure in Y.M.C.A. boys' work, had conducted his first camp at Lake Couchiching in 1905.

There was Mary S. Edgar, Director of Glen Bernard, a girls' camp near Sundridge, established in 1922. Miss Edgar's camp hymn, "God Who Toucheth Earth with Beauty", has been an inspiration to campers the world over.

And there was Ferna G. Halliday, Director of Oconto, a girls' camp in the Rideau Lakes District, started in 1925, the same year as Tanamakoon. For three years prior to establishing Oconto, Miss Halliday, along with Miss Mabel Jamieson, had been co-director of Ouareau, a girls' camp in the Laurentian Mountains, established in 1922.

Each camp reflected the personality of its director and each camp was different.

I have always been grateful for the inspiration of these more experienced directors, who loved camping for camping's sake, who set for themselves high standards and generously shared their wealth of experience.

Those early gatherings at which we recounted our trials and errors were among the most hilarious evenings I have ever spent, and through the years a firm bond of friendship grew and still holds.

It was the leadership of such directors as these that inspired the high ethical standards.

Each year, along with the directors of the organizational camps, we attended the conferences of the Camp Directors' Association in New York, Boston or Washington, as "lone" members. From this experience we gained much that served us in good stead, not only in our own camps but later on when we formed our own Association.

In 1933, with the number of camps increasing, the Ontario Camping Association was formed. Its membership

was open to all camps and camping people in Ontario, for after considerable thought it was agreed that camps of every type should be included regardless of their limitations, in order that we might all move forward toward a higher standard of practice. Mr. Taylor Statten was our first president and Mr. Cochrane our first honorary president.

The history of camping in Canada is an interesting one and will be covered more fully at the end of this book.

In 1933, the same year in which the Association was formed, I found a very able successor as principal of the Margaret Eaton School in Miss Florence A. Somers of Waltham, Massachusetts. Miss Somers had had much experience in the field of education both as teacher and as administrator, and in 1934 I felt happy to leave the School in her hands. Now after twenty-four years of service in the School, I resigned, and gave my full time to my own project.

Up to this time, camp for me had been a hobby, not a vocation. Because of my primary commitment as principal of The Margaret Eaton School, I could give it only a fraction of my time and interest.

Now there was no need to be back in the city at the end of September. I was free to stay on in Algonquin — Algonquin in its glorious October colouring — an experience I had looked forward to for many years. Now I could explore to my heart's content, go tripping, and take on camping as a profession.

At Tanamakoon the new era was marked by many innovations.

The Tanamakoon Campers' association was formed in order that we might keep in touch with our campers during the winter. Each year they arranged a picnic in the early fall at the summer home or farm of a counsellor or camper. Around New Year's, the Tanamakoon Bugler was sent out with news of campers which had been collected from the

representatives in the different cities and towns of Ontario and the United States. In the spring, there was the annual luncheon or tea. This was a formal gathering when everyone came in city clothes. Sometimes we had to take a second look before we could recognize a camper with her hair curled and inches added to her stature. Campers came from far and near, just to be together for a few brief hours.

In 1933 the first counsellors-in-training came to camp. We shall hear more of them in a later chapter.

The same year we began to redeem our stock. This accomplished, we started to provide for some of the urgent needs of Tanamakoon. Each year the necessary improvements and additions were made, and eventually a new central building was erected where all the maintenance departments could be housed. We had outgrown our dining-room to such an extent that the campers had formed an anti-noise society to make mealtime endurable. So George and the cook and I started planning, each with his own needs in mind. An architect designed a dining-room with a roof requiring no supports below. George and his men did the rest.

The building was erected behind the cabins which skirted the shore and half way between the two points, thus drawing both ends of camp together. It contained, in addition to the large dining room, a kitchen, storeroom, refrigeration plant, a staff sitting and dining-room and a unit for the preparation and packing of food for canoe trips. When finished we felt it was amazingly effective and lifted the morale of the whole camp. The old dining-room was remodelled and became a recreation room, and the old kitchen a counsellor room.

We stayed in Algonquin till November 14th that year, and then the ice started to form on the lake. To me, unfamiliar with winter ways in the wilderness, it was



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